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The Sister as Guardian.

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THE SISTER AS GUARDIAN.

A SERMON

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF

Mrs. Chloe Thompson Jenkins.

By A. C. THOMPSON,

SENIOR PASTOR OF THE ELIOT CHURCH, BOSTON.

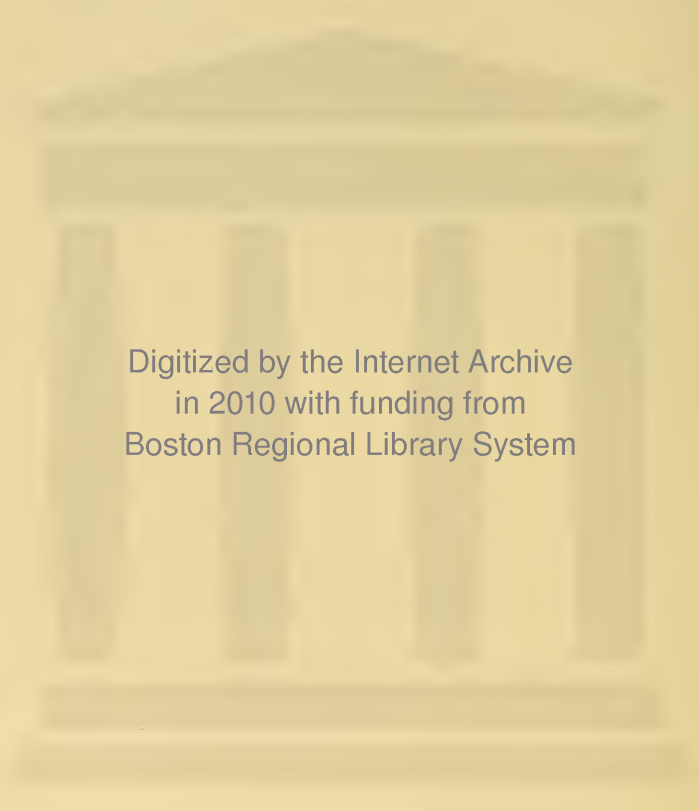
*Still in that dreamy vision by my side
My sister's figure ever seemed to glide,
Charm of each scene and genius of each place,
Than whose no sweeter form, no softer grace,
Thy stately halls, Imperial Rome, can show,
Or on thy canvas, mighty Rubens, glow.*

— ROBERT N. CUST.

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THE SISTER AS GUARDIAN.

Exodus ii: 4.—AND HIS SISTER STOOD AFAR OFF TO WIT WHAT WOULD BE DONE TO HIM.

THREE thousand and five hundred years have passed since this incident took place, yet the scene is as distinctly before us as if not more than thirty-five days had passed. We see a Hebrew mother, who belongs to an enslaved race, prepare, all unobserved, a little papyrus boat. She makes it watertight with bitumen. In it she places her beautiful infant boy who, for three months, has been hidden at home. But concealment from the merciless agents of a merciless king can no longer be effected. She seeks an hour when no witnesses are looking on to place the hope of her family among flags, near the bank of the Nile. She breathes a prayer, no doubt, to the God of Abraham; lets the child's young sister remain for a sentinel, and is herself quickly out of sight. Never did floating cradle carry such a treasure. And did ever a young heart beat like Miriam's, when she saw a princess, with her attendants, approach the very spot where that precious ark was placed, and when one of the handmaids brought it, dripping, to Pharaoh's daughter? The little girl is no longer at a distance; swift feet bring

her to the place. We, too, with her and with all in the group, look on as the ark is opened. We behold the comely child; yes, and we hear him cry. A touch of nature makes the princess disregard her father's murderous decree. The quick-witted little maiden sees her opportunity; volunteers her help to find a nurse; and at once has a commission that brings the mother of the two children to the scene. Stranger than fiction, the mother becomes the paid nurse of her own infant, who is destined to a home in the palace, to the leadership of his people, and to a name second to no other in the annals of the ancient world. Marvelous method of divine Providence, the very family which tyrannizes over Hebrew slaves is made an agent of their deliverance!

The agency of the little girl who kept watch and ward that day, and who in so timely and wise a way tendered her service, suggests a general topic for present contemplation —

THE SISTER AS GUARDIAN.

1. *The constitutional position of a sister.* In the great majority of families where there are two or more children, one at least is a daughter. This arrangement in the composition of the family is divinely appointed. The wisdom and loving-kindness of Him who founded the household are seen in the varied qualities and habits, the mutual requirements and adaptations, of this little commu-

nity. I speak of the average family as well as of its more usual make-up. The comparatively quick insight, gentleness, and delicacy of a sister, next to the distinctive qualities and position of a mother, are demanded there, and are effective. The boy is apt to be impetuous and rude, if not raw. He needs to be mellowed and toned down. Unfortunate influences—pride at his smartness among them—sometimes foster self-conceit, and wholesome humiliation is required. Or, on the other hand, he may be needlessly distrustful of himself, shy, constrained in manners, and perhaps even a martyr of diffidence. Stimulus and toning-up are then needful. He certainly is inclined to be selfish, indisposed duly to regard the rights and comfort of others. Happy circumstance it is that there should be one habitually by him whom he is bound to regard! Whatever his temperament, he is susceptible; and the sister, his most intimate associate, is just the one to supply a modifying influence. The empire of affection is hers. Assimilation is almost inevitable. Parental authority is sweetly supplemented by a congenial fellowship such as the sister alone supplies. This happy combination of domestic influences—those of the mother and sister—brings to bear just that focal power which will accomplish the desired object, if anything human can do it. What is more interesting to observe than such silent, unconscious molding of mind and man-

ners; that refining, or strengthening and ennobling process, as it goes on in the fireside seminary! From the intrinsic constitution of the household, influences must be exerted. They begin early, even long before intentionally exercised. Was Rousseau far from right when he said, "Men will always be what women make them?" We pass on to notice —

2. *The ordinary responsible influence of a sister.*

By the very composition of the family, as just stated, she will be a formative power of some kind. A function on her part is unavoidable. Abandonment of home, later, for the nunnery will not suspend obligation. To be divested of that, she must cease to be a sister, or rather must never have been a sister at all.

Thus far thought has, however, had chief reference to the period of childhood and early boyhood, and to a sister's influence maintained by natural qualities, without clearly formed purpose, or a well-defined sense of duty. We move on in thought, and contemplate the little girl as now a maturing maiden or a young woman. We conceive of her as possessing good sense — too good sense to aspire at being a mere parlor ornament, a slave of fashion, a walking exhibition of dry goods, full of vanity and affectation of gentility, whom no brother or sister can respect, and whom no man should marry unless he has a fortune to spend and a life to throw away. It is, in some good measure, an ideal sister whom we have in mind, one of active domestic habits; who accepts

various home duties as a matter of course; who accounts no useful service unladylike; whose tenderness is not allied to weakness, and whose sprightliness does not degenerate into frivolity. Her quiet industrious habits dignify labor. Her keen native sense of propriety is far more charming than any costly necklace. Her self-control and amiability help to create a perfumed atmosphere about the house. Can the brother help feeling it? His excessive exuberance, if unchecked, would make him a domestic blizzard; and the inflated sense of his own importance would make him an insufferable bore. The sister reads character better than he does. She has become conscious of more power over him than he has over her, and thoughts of corresponding responsibility are awakened. She discovers a need, and it becomes a study with her how she may successfully restrain and guide. She patiently strives to cultivate in him the virtue of self-restraint, the rare virtue of leaving off at the right time. She moderates his wild fancies, and shows him the difference between meteors and stars. Is there some danger from outside quarters of his becoming a fast young man? Her prompt penetration fathoms the problem. She discerns that it is not courage but cowardice, a lack of moral independence, that makes him liable to the use of profane language, to indulge in the cigarette and the wineglass. With true feminine tact she sets herself to the task of guardianship. She makes a

study of all helpful little ways of good influence. Between the sister and the brother there is a freer intimacy than between the parents and him. In her skillful magnetism, unsuspected as to its design, there may be a latent power more successful than what the father or mother wields. To her falls a large share in constituting home a gladsome sanctuary. For a beloved brother or sister she has the art of making the month of May extend round the whole year. Through assimilation her excellent qualities pass, to some extent, into the character and life of these intimate associates. "I am not a rose," saith an Eastern proverb, "but I have lived with the rose."

The young man's appetites are often strong, and the flood of bad example may carry him away in its current. There is not always a princess at hand to brave the tyranny of custom. Has a wreck become imminent? Oh, the agony of a sister's heart, and—thank God—the tenderness of that heart! A concrete case will illustrate. "I was once intoxicated," said a young man. "In company with jovial companions I drank freely, and by the time I reached home I scarcely knew where I was. How long I lay in bed I do not know; but when I awoke, my sister was sitting by and sewing. The moment her eye fell on me she burst into tears, and wept as if her heart would break. Overwhelmed with shame I resolved never to be in that condition again, and have kept my pledge."

Let me not be misunderstood as if carried away by the usual exaggeration in dwelling on female excellencies. There is a style of talk as offensive to sensible women as it is false in itself. Angelic is a term to be reserved sacredly for a different order of beings. No man was ever born a cherub, nor any woman an angel.

Allusion has already been made to specimens of weakness. We cannot help noticing and pitying them. Some give themselves over to a degenerate sentimentality; they have marked talent for wretchedness; they seem to think it a great achievement of sensibility to faint at an injury to the lapdog, or swoon at the death of a canary bird. Their mental food is chiefly rations of gossip and romance; they are simply womanish, not womanly. The result is a bundle of dislikes for the actual, and vain longings for the impossible, while the moral sense becomes sadly dwarfed and limp. Intimacy with such can have only a depressing effect, and is suited to breed contempt.

True, mere feebleness of this sort may exist without very much wickedness; and by those similarly feeble may be pronounced delicate, and perhaps angelic, and with about as much discrimination as a ribbon or a bit of lace is pronounced divine. But alas! that there should be characters worse than weak, characters marked by darkest depravity—women like Catherine de Medici, perfidious and remorseless to

the last degree; sisters like Herodias, one day enchanting royalty with their graces, the next day bearing the ghastly head of John the Baptist. Say you, Was not woman the crowning work of creation, the finishing ornament of Paradise? Yes, and the first, too, in a transgression that ruined the race. Say you, Did not idealizing Greece, with a keen sense of beauty, picture the Muses and Graces as feminine? Yes, and so too the Fates and the Furies. Disguise it as poetry may, the simple, prosaic truth stands out plainly that apostasy is universal. There is a taint on human nature, a corruption, which, if left to itself, will work out, in man and woman alike, direful results of sin and guilt. Wichern, founder of the well-known Reformatory at Horn, near Hamburg, said, "I have never seen so downright a wicked spirit in the boy as in the girl." We proceed to consider

3. *The sister's religious responsibility.* The fact of her inevitable influence of some kind, by virtue simply of presence in the family, we have seen. The promptings of natural conscience and natural affection that lead to purpose-like endeavors, have also engaged attention. But there is a sphere and style yet higher—the domain of religion. We now contemplate the sister as possessed of those genuine evangelical traits and principles that result from the special grace of God. The former is a high type, but not the highest type of womanhood. Christian character, because of its relation to a kingdom not

of this world, implies responsibilities and a spiritual power transcendent and unique. Much has been written — manifold chapters and volumes indeed — regarding maternal duties. Not enough, relatively, has been said about the father's peculiar obligations, and still less about the sister's speciality. In the divine thought there is a religious speciality for every member of the household; and it behooves each to have a well defined idea and a deep sense of distinctive ethical claims. Nothing short of highest aims should be thought of, the soul's wellbeing and steady advancement heavenward. Manners have their importance; mental accomplishments deserve, of course, constant consideration; still, one thing is needful — repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ; yea, more; not only these required conditions of personal escape from wrath to come, but utmost endeavor for the advancement of Christ's reign on earth.

It is not the brother alone that we have in mind; but likewise sisters, younger and older as the case may be. Sometimes it falls to a daughter to take substantially the place of a mother disabled by sickness or prematurely removed by death. In one of the little groups she notices an excessive ambition for social display, great irritability of temper, or an habitual self-concentration. Here is a task requiring supreme tact, tenderness, and firmness. To instill right sentiments, with a view to correct pervers-

sities of disposition, and permanently to ennoble motives, is an achievement effected only by Christian patience and by prayer. Is it not in regard to such sisters, if to any human beings, that propriety authorizes us to inquire, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them that shall be heirs of salvation?"

Let it be repeated, we keep the average family before the eye. There are only a few princesses in the world, and few are needed. Only one boy has passed from a boat of flags to the splendor of a palace, to the leadership and legislation of his people. And yet it is families previously undistinguished, like that of Amram and Jochebed, that have furnished a large proportion of the men eminent in history. What truly great son, or what great and good work ever came of a fashionable woman? But many a pious sister, in the humbler walks of life, has helped to furnish the world with some of its noblest and most useful characters. The same is now and then true in families of a higher social grade. It was the example and persuasion of Macrina, his sister, that led Basil the Great, who became Bishop of Cæsarea in the fourth century, to abandon the profession of law and devote himself to a religious life. Great Britain, India, and the civilized world at large are debtors to Letitia Lawrence, within the present century, for her strong, helpful influence on the two brothers, Lord John

and Sir Henry Lawrence. They entertained an almost unbounded reverence and affection for her. Speaking of his prize volumes, the elder, afterwards Lord John, would say: "They are Letitia's books; they are all hers; I should not have had one of them but for her." To win place in a roll-call of honor, such as runs through the last chapter of Romans, no college diploma, no new organization is needed. The demand is for wise religious fidelity at home; for due appreciation of the sanctities of that spot; for a higher-toned faith and affection, and a consciousness that will never slacken at trifles — nor at formidable discouragements either — that shall insure unobtrusive independence of fashion and of the unreasonable mandates of society. A bustling, ostentatious activity will prove self-defeating. There is no genuine woman where there is no quiet reserve, any more than there is genuine religion without reverence.

Not only is there a call for this sweetly plastic power over early life, but there is sometimes occasion later for an office of rescue — a peculiarly tender and arduous work. Let one more instance illustrate. At a public meeting a man testified: "For nine years I was from home in the midst of dangers such as only a poor sailor boy knows. I was reckless and sin-hardened. The vessel in which I sailed came at length into our harbor, and for a few hours I was home again. It had

for years been supposed that I was dead; yet an attached sister never gave me up, but kept telling her mother that Joseph would some day come home again, and that she expected to see him a Christian before he died. Her faithful appeals to me to leave my sins and cling to Jesus, and her promise upon my leaving home again, that for every line I wrote she would send me six, made me feel that I must no longer stay away from my sister's Saviour. I fell upon my knees between the guns, while my mates were swinging in their hammocks, and gave myself to Jesus." What Andrew did for Simon Peter, many a sister has done for her brother.

It should be added —

4. *The sister's guardianship is remunerative.* It proves remunerative, not, however, in the way of design, for a thought of that kind might vitiate the whole. A happy reflex influence upon character results; but the resulting benefit is spontaneous and unanticipated. There can be no doubt that Miriam's office of watch and ward was fruitful in lasting help to herself. It must have operated as a healthful stimulus through remaining girlhood, at least, and not improbably through life. She certainly became a distinguished woman, and the position of her sex in the nation of Israel was improved thereby. She is spoken of as a prophetess; she rendered service in poetry and music. By the mouth of the prophet Micah, Jehovah testifies to Israel: "I brought thee

up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of bondage, and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam." When she died there was a thirty days' public mourning at Kadesh. Her name had become a favorite before the advent of Christ; and in the form borne by the mother of Jesus, Mary, it has since been borne by more women than any other in Christendom.

Whatever contributes to build up a strong and symmetrical religious character is of prime value. And is not a home ministry, such as we have been considering, peculiarly suited to that end? It is impossible that any one should labor for the moral and spiritual welfare of another and not experience a blessed reacting influence. Nothing ennobles and beautifies like the practice of disinterestedness; hence, the sweetest voice is the voice of Christian fidelity; the most beautiful hand, the hand of Christian benevolence. Not very unfrequently do we witness a loving devotion of the kind spoken of that charms us; sometimes it rises to heroism. The choicest and most commanding traits are thus developed, both in the higher and the humbler walks of life. Not without tears of admiration do we read the story of Perpetua, a martyr of the third century, who said to her brother and another Christian: "Continue firm in the faith; love one another; be not offended at our sufferings;" and was then thrown to the wild beasts.

And what a treasure is reciprocated fraternal

affection ! Does any copartnership result in a wealth of enjoyment surpassing what is accumulated thus beneath the family roof-tree ? The truest, tenderest place in the wide world is a pure woman's heart ; and hence the rupture of fraternal fellowship by death is second to few bereavements. Was not deep grief in the family at Bethany most natural ? Even Jesus wept. The Hon. Robert Boyle, the Christian philosopher, could survive his noble sister, Viscountess Ranelagh, only a few days. For forty years their close fellowship had been devoted to the highest interests of mankind ; the heart-stricken brother was buried at the same time and in the same grave with her.

A short time since there came a telegram, couched in these words : " Died this morning, at half past nine, of heart-failure." The one thus referred to had, for a number of recent years, worshiped with this congregation a month or two annually, and some of you had made her acquaintance. Private feelings, whether of affection or of grief, do not authorize the introduction of personal matters into a service so public as this, with any view except to benefit others. There is a hope at the present time that especially those standing in the relation now contemplated may receive benefit. A departed sister has indeed just been sitting for an outline portrait, not as an extraordinary character, but as one of yourselves, one whose life, now closed, suggests helpful reflections.

Permit me then to present you with a sketch, more individualized though in miniature, of a Christian sister — a sister who watched the cradle, and who ministered to the manhood of a younger brother. The family Bible gives the date of birth eighty-two years and five months ago. A girlhood not to be pictured as remarkable, yet bright, of a mold evidently superior, with symmetry of features and form, graceful movements, womanly manners, and a general bearing above the average, presents itself. There were thoughts and aspirations higher than the prevailing tone of a rural township. The first small flower garden of the neighborhood was a concession to her taste. Thirst for knowledge, and facility in acquisition, fostered studiousness. When, for example, the small volume of Jane Taylor's hymns came into the house, she soon committed them all to memory; and thence onward lyric poetry, especially sacred lyrics, had a peculiar charm for her. But studies that appeal slightly to the imagination — mathematics and natural philosophy — were also pursued with zest. Even the dry volumes of Rollin's *Ancient History* were mastered.

That crisis in life — the most important that can take place — religious conversion, came early. It was at a period in New England when present superficiality of Christian experience, resulting largely from a partial suppression of evangelical truth, would have created alarm. Not only was the love of God as

manifested in the unspeakable gift set forth, but also the condition of man as justly condemned—in the light of which condition alone can the amazing love and wisdom of God be adequately estimated. The awful demerit of sin, the endlessness of future punishment, the fearful guilt and peril of unbelief, the liability of false hopes, the criminal condition of insensibility to things spiritual, the absolute need of something more than divine teaching and example—yea, the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, and appropriating faith thereof—the need by every human being of regeneration through the Holy Spirit, were truths which had due prominence in the pulpit. The teaching of these obvious, all-important truths was suited to produce conviction of sin, without which there can be no felt need of a Saviour. The young woman of whom I speak, though previously blameless in outward life, had deep conviction of sin, saw the inadequacy of all her own good endeavors, saw the need and the wondrous glory of free grace in the atonement of Jesus Christ, and was the recipient of a sacred calm and holy joy. High-minded before, she now became high-souled, self-distrustful, and disposed to make her home in the vale of humility. Thenceforward there was a growing love and reverence for God's Word, the Lord's Day, the Lord's house and ordinances. The welfare of the local church, and of the whole church on earth, enlisted her deep interest. Home missions, foreign missions,

and the education of young men for the ministry, never failed to stir the soul, and draw forth a cheerful contribution. She was one of the seaman's friends, one of the Indian's friends, and in neighborhood relief was a Lady Bountiful. It was not heedless giving, nor giving from mere impulse, but thoughtfully, wisely, delicately done, as far removed from ostentation as from selfish restraint.

The heart was a well of kindness, of living, practical sympathy, but also the abode of a strong sense of justice. The sentiment of right and wrong was dominant. The man or woman devoid of deep moral repugnance to iniquity, devoid of indignation in this world, is a weakling. As a whole, the character was symmetrical, most happily balanced, marked good sense controlling utterance and movement. Ambition to shine; the coveting of unenjoyed positions; the revolving of untimely or futile projects, as well as indulgence in vain regrets, seemed to have no place in her thoughts. Language and bearing were the exponent of a mind poised, active, and cultured. A common and pernicious exaggeration in the use of terms, such as "awful," "horrid," was foreign to her ideas of the sacredness of truth and the fitness of things. In ordinary intercourse, genuine refinement and lambent humor gilded even the commonplaces of life. A calm, unstudied dignity of manner, indicating dignity of character, and while approaching the courtly, having no semblance of haughtiness, com-

manded respect from every one and avowed admiration from many.

Of her as wife, mother, and household mistress, I say nothing. It is chiefly of one relation that, a deeply indebted brother, I have spoken, and for your sake, my friends, have spoken. The invaluable ministry to a family group occasioned this discourse. A beautiful life in earlier years, with its treasures of affection and benign power, has passed in partial review; while the later annual welcome, for half a century, to her home, has stood before the mind's eye. The radiant countenance, the hallowed atmosphere, the abundant enjoyments of that home were a benediction. A high type of womanhood, molded and crowned by Christ-like readiness of self-sacrifice for others, had its abode there. To the cross of Christ, to the grace of God, be all the praise. Yes, by the cross of Christ there stood "his mother's sister," too. The last sound that fell on this beloved one's ear was a daughter's sweet voice singing a favorite hymn:

"Sun of my soul! thou Saviour dear,
It is not night if thou be near."

"At half-past nine, of heart-failure," but God was still the strength of her heart, and will be her portion forever. Looking to the other side of the sea, I behold a sister, escaped from this house of bondage, timbrel in hand, and the song of triumph on her tongue.

